

THE CARNIVAL AT ROME.

"This feast is named the Carnival, which being interpreted, implies—'farewell to flesh.'"—BYRON.

A WEEK or two since the fun, fast and furious, of the Roman Carnival was at its height. Unless varied by some particular event (for instance, the presence of the Prince of Wales last year), the Carnival of one year is pretty much the same as the Carnival of another; so that, although the mad scenes of mirth the writer is about to describe occurred a few years since, very similar ones were undoubtedly taking place, with much the same scenery and dresses, though many of the actors were changed.

For eight days this modern Saturnalia holds "sovereign sway and masterdom" over the city of Rome; and there are few quarters in which tokens of its reign do not appear in the shape of an endless variety of costumes, exhibited in shops of all descriptions, which have become extempore masquerade warehouses, containing harlequins, mysterious-looking dominoes, ponchinelli, and dresses of all periods, many of them stuffed, and hanging by the neck, or standing beside the door, looking as though they had officiated at every Carnival for the last half century. In the grocers' and confectioners' shops are bushels of sugar-plums, bonbons, and tempting little trifles done up in gold, silver, and coloured papers. The expenditure of *scudi* annually is estimated at one million, about 212,500*l.*; the expenditure of *fun* defies calculation. The grand scene of the Carnival is the Corso, a straight street about a mile in length, which, though considerably too narrow for the comfortable performance of business or pleasure, is the best street in the Eternal City. As on a great Festa day, all the windows and balconies are hung with tapestries

and draperies of the brightest colours, and flags and streamers of every kind flutter in the air. The festival is opened in due form by a Cardinal; it commences each day at one o'clock, reaches its climax about four, and concludes with a horse-race just before the Ave Maria.

The fifth day, "Giovedì grasso" (fat Thursday), as it is termed, is considered *the* day, especially among "the people," whose custom it is on that day to do their utmost in the way of costume. The "Giovedì grasso," however, of the year of which we are writing was a failure, owing to that with us common misfortune—the weather. For when the Corso had become a dense mass of carriages and people—when bouquets and sugar-plums were ascending and descending unceasingly—when every window framed a group, and the balconies groaned beneath their loads—when smiles were on all faces—when boys were courting destruction beneath horses' hoofs and carriage-wheels in struggles after bonbons and bouquets—when the long street echoed from end to end with gay laughter—when flower, "*confetti*," and sugar-plum sellers were roaring themselves hoarse—it began to rain.

For a time the fun continued with unabated vigour, but so did the rain; and although the votaries of pleasure fought obstinately, at last it conquered; umbrellas showed thickly among the foot passengers, the carriages commenced a retreat, the occupants of the balconies quitted their posts, the archways and porticoes became crowded by motley groups, the *confetti* and sugar-plums turned into paste, and the bouquets were swallowed up in the mud—and so ended this particular "Giovedì grasso."

But the eighth and last day made amends for all, and I will endeavour to describe something of what we saw on that day. Just as W. and I were starting, our landlady, a Roman matron of the largest size, entered our room with her two daughters, to show us how well they looked. The eldest was simply dressed in a black velvet body and yellow satin skirt; but her sister, a thorough little Roman, with large black eyes, was very gaily attired in a white satin skirt, trimmed with gold lace, just short enough to show a well-turned leg and ankle, a jacket of red, blue vest, and a sort of turban. Of course I expressed great admiration, and asked if the latter costume represented anything particular.

"Sì, Signor, la figlia d'un bandito," (Yes, sir, the daughter of a brigand.)

"And does your husband go as the brigand, and you, Signora, as the brigand's wife?" I simply asked.

"O Dio! no, Signor. Che coppia faremmo!" (Why what a pair we should make!) she cried, with a laugh.

The daughters also laughed; and the youngest threw up her lustrous eyes to the ceiling, exclaiming, "O Dio mio, che bell' idea." (Oh my, what a fine joke!) And certainly the idea was absurd, for the father was a slight, mild-looking, white-haired man, the very antipodes to a brigand, and the mother, as I have said, of the largest Roman dimensions.

But I must hasten to the real business in



hand. Let us imagine ourselves, about three o'clock, in the Corso. The weather is lovely, the fun is at its height. As we stand here, at the end of the street leading into the Piazza del Popolo, a most stirring and brilliant perspective meets the eye: every window and balcony, from top to bottom of the houses, is decorated with draperies of some bright colour, and every window and balcony is occupied by spectators of and combatants in the revel, many in masquerade attire, and all gaily dressed. The fronts of the shops have been removed, and the spaces fitted up like the boxes of a theatre. Bright coloured streamers float out into the street, innumerable rods project from the windows, baited with oranges, bonbons, and quaintly dressed puppets, which are bobbed among the passing crowd, and the unceasing shower of bouquets, &c., from above and below—all give a life and flutter to the scene impossible to describe. The street is almost impassable, so thickly is it crowded by revellers on foot, and two ranks of carriages slowly moving in opposite directions; but let us move on, noting as we go a few of the different scenes that are occurring. Look at that girl at a first-floor window on the left, she whose fine figure is shown to the best advantage in a bright blue jacket and crimson vest, and a black velvet cap set knowingly on her head. She has not missed a day of the eight; and each day, from the commencement to the end, has stood smilingly at her post, receiving tribute from her admirers, and dispensing favours with the grace of a queen. Look, one stops beneath her window, and throws a choice bouquet; but his aim is bad, and it falls into the hands of one of the many urchins around, who, like harpies, dart upon anything near them. She nevertheless acknowledges the attempt with a smile, and drops a bonbon in return. He stretches forth his hand to catch it, but some flowers from a neighbouring window on one side, and a shower of *confetti* on the other, confuse him, and the bonbon follows the fate of the bouquet; but before he has recovered himself, the lady has taken a little basket decorated with ribbons, placed another bonbon within, and commenced lowering it by a string; it soon reaches his eager hand, and he presses it to his lips with rapture; then, diving into a pouch by his side, produces some still choicer trifle, and puts it into the basket. The lady quickly pulls it up, and smiles graciously; and he, laying his hand on his heart, goes his way. Who is this stalking so gravely along, dressed in black, with knee breeches, capacious wig, and spectacles, immense shirt-frill and buckles, and a large book under his arm. See, he stops two masked young ladies in short petticoats and flesh-coloured stockings, takes one by the wrist, and solemnly feels her pulse; the result is a portentous shake of the head, and the word "*innamorata*," pronounced in solemn tones. He opens his book, and is about to read, when a being dressed in white, his coat ornamented with huge red buttons, a white cap on his head, and his face of a floury paleness, rushes past with an unearthly yell, bestowing as he goes a sounding blow, with an inflated bladder fastened to a stick, upon the Doctor's back: and at the same moment

a shower of *confetti* from a passing carriage turns his black garments into the hue of a miller's.

That domino at an upper window, fishing about with an orange over the heads of the crowd, thinks it is quite secure, and is complacently facetious over the failure of a young man in a carriage, who, in trying to grasp it, almost loses his balance, only saving himself by clutching desperately at a long-bearded Turk, his companion; but lo! while the fisherman is enjoying the effects of his skill, a hooked stick is suddenly thrust out of a lower window, the line dragged in, and the next moment it hangs baitless in the air, a derisive peal of laughter following.

Surely yonder sits a woman on a coach-box, handling the whip and reins like a practised Jehu. Her bonnet is of Gampish size, but how coquettishly she sets her head on one side, and allows an unusual portion of white stocking to appear beyond her petticoats. Is she pretty? She turns her face towards us. What a mistake we have made! Do you not see the whiskers beneath those well-oiled ringlets? Among the "fast" young Romans, this is a very favourite disguise.

"*Brava! brava!*" See that fair young girl with round, rosy cheeks, and fine white teeth: her hair all dishevelled with her exertions, how she struggles against a very hurricane of bouquets and sugar-plums—returning them with both hands in a perfect fever of excitement and delight! She indeed enjoys the Carnival with all her joyous young heart. She seems made for the situation.

Various are the contrivances by which the safe delivery of a bouquet or bonbon is insured without throwing them. Perhaps the most clever is carried by yonder policinello:—it appears to be a number of pieces of painted wood, fastened together; but wait a moment; he is fixing some flowers to it. He stops under a window a good height from the ground, where stand two pretty girls costumed *à la paysanne*, in white head-dresses and red bodices; he looks up at them with a comical grin, and they throw him flowers. Holding up his little instrument with both hands, he gives a quick jerk with his elbows, and up fly a connected series of wooden diamonds (like a gigantic child's toy), with his flowers on the highest point. The girls are a little startled at first; then, with a merry laugh, they make a dash at the bouquet,—at the same time, however, a little puppet at the end of a string passing slowly across the window diverts the attention of one of them; she makes a grasp at it, but the doll, moved by a skilful hand, flies from her like a Will-o'-the-Wisp; meanwhile her companion has secured the bouquet, and the diamonds have returned to their former shape.

The cries of "*Fiori—ecco fiori! Confetti, confetti, un bajocco la libra!*" (Flowers—here are flowers! Sugar-plums, one bajocco a pound!), bawled by twenty or thirty voices, fill the air; and here we are at the top of the Via de' Condotti, the street by which the carriages must enter the Corso, and which is a complete market-place for flower and *confetti* sellers. We are now in the very thick of the fun. That is the long balcony of the Caffé Nuovo, and is chiefly occupied by foreigners. At this part of the Corso the English are in great force, pelting away, especially the fairer

portion, with unflagging spirit. Attached to the fronts of the balconies in which they stand, are long wooden boxes filled with ammunition. "*Ecco fiori, ecco fiori! Confetti, confetti!*" No pause to the fun. The air is darkened with flowers, and whitened with *confetti*, and rings with peals of laughter. The blood of the quietest must be roused by such a merry tumult: even those who had sagely declared it must be a vastly "slow affair" and "very childish," are warmed into active life. Everything is forgotten but the desire to be doing—to have, if it were possible, hands and eyes everywhere. Why, the hundreds upon hundreds of faces beaming with mirth and mischief, were alone enough to create the highest degree of pleasure: a hundredth part of the glances given by bright eyes that come flashing from the topmost stories of the houses to the pavement, were enough to fever the blood; but when the bright sunlight and blue sky, the movement of gay colours, and mad humour of the scene is added, a degree of wild excitement—an intoxicating sensation, surpassing the effect of the best champagne—is produced, that nothing of the like nature can equal. Here the representatives of a dozen different nations jostle one another—Italians, English, Americans, French, Germans, Swiss, Danes, Poles, Russians, Greeks, &c.—all animated for once by one object, forgetting their individuality in the enjoyment of the moment.

How firmly and easily the Roman girls sit on the backs of the carriages, with their feet on the seats, as though they were accustomed to the position every day of their lives. On the back of one vehicle is enthroned a handsome woman in flowing robes, with a tiara on her head; the flowers fall about her like hail, and she, Flora like, dispenses them as abundantly. In the next carriage are three or four girls dressed in Eastern costume, looking like a cloud of white muslin. In another are three Greeks, wearing wire masks and patriarchal beards, which are continually getting entangled in a high basket in the middle of the carriage, into which they dive for flowers.

Among the maskers on foot there is the greatest variety of costume, especially in a ridiculous style. Policinelli by the score; *vivandières* enough for an army; young ladies in black masks and full muslin petticoats, quite the ballet-dancer's cut, always talking on a high note; men in fancy Court dresses, with huge bag-wigs and buckles, looking at everything through immense eyeglasses; harlequins—enormous faces with scarcely any legs; Indians, feathers and war-paint complete; mediæval costumes, one leg red, the other yellow; men with false noses a foot long, &c., &c.

Here comes a carriage filled with young Englishmen "got up" as sailors, who in a wild state of excitement fire unceasing broadsides at the fair ones on either side of the street. Their costume is not very orthodox; one wears a planter's straw hat; another sports a white high-crowned beaver, fiercely cocked, with a feather in it; while their shirts are of divers colours. In the centre of their carriage stands a huge basket of *confetti*, while flowers are piled up in every available part. Their carriage stops opposite one in the other rank, containing a party dressed in full blouses and wearing

wire masks, on which are painted faces of the most sublime inanity. "Is it peace or war?" cry the blouses to the sailors. The reply is a discharge of *confetti*, and a furious combat commences; while various parties from the windows, apparently actuated by much the same feelings that set all the dogs in a neighbourhood upon two of their fellows engaged in battle, shower down the contents of their wooden boxes on both sets of combatants—and they are not "*confetti da signore*" (gentlemanly sugar-plums) that are chiefly used, but villanous hard ones, made of flour and plaster of Paris: the ground is presently as white as though it had snowed.

The sailors discharge their small shot recklessly with both hands; their opponents take more deliberate aim through long tin tubes; the sailors seem to be getting the best of it, when a sudden "move on" in the ranks takes them slowly away, till the distance is too great for *confetti*, so they continue the fight with very small oranges, which fly among the crowd, catching the unwary unpleasant blows. The good humour, however, is unbroken. One unfortunate, wearing an enormous mask of a most Bacchic expression, which nearly covers him, the only parts of his person exposed being his arms and a pair of skinny calves clothed in bright blue, receives so many of their tokens, that we think something more than chance directs them, and certainly he is a tempting mark. Now an orange catches him on the side of the head,—quite staggering him—then a second rights his balance by taking him smartly across his blue terminations, and a third strikes his false carbuncled nose, to the great amusement of every one. The last feat performed before the belligerents separate is accomplished by one of the sailors, who, observing a blouse take off his mask to wipe the flour from his face, skilfully strikes it from his hand with an orange, and away it goes over the heads of the crowd, with many a cry of "*Corpo di Bacco, ben fatto!*"

We have now arrived at the opposite extremity of the Corso, the Piazza di Venezia, and near the carpet into which the horses plunge—for a horse-race is to terminate the day's proceedings. Let us therefore return as fast as may be, in order to be in time for the starting from the Piazza del Popolo. That gun is the signal for all carriages and vehicles to leave the Corso, which they do with almost magical rapidity by the various streets on the right and left, a body of dragoons assisting in the operation with little ceremony, after which they station themselves at each outlet, while the foot soldiers try to keep a way clear for the race in the centre of the Corso. The Roman dragoons are formidable keepers of the street: they are noble-looking fellows; their swords of an enormous length, and their horses large and powerful, and the men use both swords and horses in an unscrupulous way. They present a fine appearance in their white cloaks—both men and horses remain at their posts now as immovable as statues.

In front of the obelisk and fountain in the Piazza del Popolo the horses start. On both sides of the square, galleries and platforms are erected for the accommodation of those who like to pay, and motley groups are there assembled. A little

before six o'clock the horses, seven or eight in number, are led forth by their respective grooms—riders they have none—each animal painted over with arabesques, a feather on its head, and sundry contrivances dangling about its body, partly for ornament, partly to accelerate its speed. They are all eager to start, and with difficulty the grooms can bring them to stand facing the cable stretched from side to side of the course.

At this moment some half-dozen dragoons gallop down the Corso at a most furious pace, scattering the crowd before them like chaff; and the course is now considered clear.

A grey horse—which generally wins in this riderless race—is the most unmanageable of the troop. His plunging and rearing set the rest in confusion, and the situation of the men who hold them is not enviable. Some of the animals strive to leap over the rope, and in the *melée* down go a horse and man together. The grey horse at last is brought to the cable. The moment he feels his chest against it he rears almost upright, and coming down half way over the rope, it falls to the ground. The grooms hold on no longer; and with a rush like a whirlwind, the horses fly down the Corso, their hoofs striking fire from the stones—the grey one ahead. The firing of a gun a minute later proclaims the carpet in the Piazza di Venezia is reached, and the race is over.

After this follows the diversion of the *moccoletti*—a most lively and exciting amusement—every one engaging in it carrying a lighted candle, which he tries to preserve to the last against the efforts of every one else to extinguish it. Sometimes an unfortunate who has battled bravely through a group all intent on putting out his *moccòlo*, finds it suddenly extinguished by a huge, gaily-painted extinguisher, let down from a balcony overhead. This is the most fatiguing sport of the Carnival, as one has not only to defend one's own *moccòlo*, but to expend a vast amount of breath in puffing out one's neighbour's. Then the streets ring with the words "*Senza moccòlo!*" (without a light) shouted in every diversity of voice and accent—and amid this tumult, struggle, and wild sport the Carnival terminates. To-morrow begin Lenten observances, and fasting and devotions take the place of feasting and revelry.

The last year of the Carnival is always being predicted, but it seems never to come; and, certainly, as a truly popular amusement, bringing all classes together in perfect good humour, and on the same footing, it would be a pity it should cease to be, for we think that seldom is the fun and frolic converted into riot or unlawful excesses. So we say, in parting with it, "*Evviva il Carnevale.*"

T. R. MACQUOID.